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ABSTRACT

In order to provide counseling services to ethnic minorities in a large university, a program was initiated to train minority students to function as counselors. The training program consisted of a one-quarter course in counseling. Approximately 70 students enrolled in the course, instructed by two psychiatrists, a counseling psychologist, and two advanced psychology graduate students. Lectures and discussion sessions focused on issues such as cultural background of minorities, crisis intervention, assessment, and helping relationships. Students also participated in small group encounters and in counselor-counselee role playing experiences. Several conclusions were drawn from the program. First, students and instructors agreed on which students would be the best counselors. Second, specific skills were viewed by students as favorable counselor attributes. Third, the training of more militant students to function as counselors was a feasible plan. (Author/BW)

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# The Training of "Third World" Students to Function As Counselors[1]

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One of the most difficult problems on college and university campuses has been the development of trust and credibility between campus administrators and "third world" or ethnically-conscious minority students. Without adequately understanding the needs of the students, many administrators have frequently financed ethnic studies programs in order to avoid the confrontation of minority students. On the other hand, more militant students often perceive institutions of higher education as reflecting the prejudice and discrimination of society. This mutual distrust hinders the development of relevant campus programs to aid minority groups and the acceptance of these programs by minority students. While many minority students experience personal problems and "culture shock" at universities, few students seem to trust existing campus services.

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This report describes a program aimed at providing counseling services to minority students. The program was initiated by several staff members at the Student Health Psychiatric Clinic of the University of California, Los Angeles. The Clinic typically treated students on an outpatient basis with traditional modes of psychotherapy, occasionally supplemented by the use of medication. Students exhibited problems ranging from mild depressed states to chronic psychotic conditions. Minority students (American Indians, Asian-Americans, Blacks, and Chicanos) represented about 20% of the student body.

Through extensive discussions, the staff concluded that very few minority students sought the Clinic services. In order to gain a better understanding of the underutilization of the services, the directors of the four ethnic studies programs were invited to participate in the discussions. They felt that many minority students experienced academic and personal problems but that these students avoided traditional mental health services for several reasons. First, there were usually few professional therapists who were themselves members of minority groups. Indeed, the Psychiatric Clinic had only one minority staff member--a clinical psychology intern. The lack of minority therapists and counselors meant that minority students would have to seek help from white therapists. Having to ask for help from white individuals reinforced the feelings of personal powerlessness of minority individuals in society. Second, many students felt that the psychotherapeutic process was designed for the white middle class. Schofield (1964) argues that therapists often exhibit the "Yavis syndrome," a tendency to select clients who are young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, and introspective. Minority students believed that their personal problems and cultural experiences would not be adequately understood by therapists oriented to the middle class. Third, the Clinic was identified with an "establishment" institution. Ethnically-conscious students were suspicious that University-sponsored services would serve to maintain the status quo and would retard their efforts to develop identity and self pride. This suspicion is not without some justification. Psychology as a whole can be viewed as a handmaiden of the status quo (Tedeschi and O'Donovan, 1971); and the personal adjustment of student activists and militants has been frequently questioned (Sue and Sue, 1972).

Traditional forms of psychotherapeutic intervention with minority group clients have also been criticized by mental health professionals. Members of

ethnic minorities often receive less "preferred" and less expensive forms of therapy for mental health problems (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958; Yamamoto, James, and Palley, 1968). Even among those minority-group clients who actually receive individual psychotherapy, having a white therapist impedes the therapeutic process in many cases (Vontress, 1970). Carkhuff and Pierce (1967) found more self exploration in clients who had counselors of the same race and social class. Finally, minority-group individuals often avoid mental health services since they are unable to relate to the process of psychotherapy (Sue and Sue, 1971). These problems point to the inadequacies of current mental health care for Black, Chicano, and Asian-American clients.

## Paraprofessional Counselors as an Alternative

In an attempt to provide counseling services to minority students, the Clinic staff initiated a program to train minority students to function as counselors for other minority students. Our plans were guided by the reported successes of many programs utilizing paraprofessionals as psychotherapeutic agents (Guerney, 1969). Housewives, students, disadvantaged laymen, and allied professionals have been found to effectively aid a wide variety of clients. The assumptions underlying the use of paraprofessionals are that (1) a vast source of therapeutic manpower exists in the community, (2) therapeutic skills can often be found in individuals who have had little formal training in the behavioral sciences, and (3) mental health care ultimately rests with community resources.

These three assumptions seem applicable to ethnic minorities on college campuses. College students have served in a variety of therapeutic roles (Gruver, 1971). Individuals of ethnic minorities have also been cast in the helping role. For example, Banks, Berenson, and Carkhuff (1967) found that an inexperienced Black undergraduate student serving as a counselor functioned as effectively with

Black clients as White counselors with varying degrees of experience. Furthermore, the Black clients tended to prefer the Black counselor over the White counselors. Klein (1966) employed Negro youths to work with disturbed and needy adolescents in a ghetto area. The Black youths, referred to the program by youth-serving agencies, were not screened by the project director. Although many of the youths had prior police records and little education, Klein concluded that they served an important and satisfactory role in helping others.

## Program Description

In organizing the program we were confronted with several issues. How would the staff recruit minority students? What kind of training should be initiated? In what capacity would the students function? Again, the directors of the various ethnic studies programs were consulted. Since we wanted to inform minority students of the program, notices describing the program were distributed throughout the campus. An article announcing the project was also placed in the student newspaper. Incidentally, in order to give the program more credibility, it was mentioned that the program was planned by the Clinic staff and the directors of Ethnic Studies.

In regard to training, we felt that students could be trained in a short time to develop their interpersonal skills. Once they actually started counseling, the staff could provide continual supervision of the student counselors.

After consulting with the Psychology Department, the Clinic staff was given approval to offer a course dealing with the peer counseling of minority students. The course was primarily aimed at providing students with an introduction to counseling techniques. Lectures and discussion sessions formed an integral part of the course. Several areas of content were stressed. First, since the counseling services would be directed toward members of minority groups, a considerable amount

of time was spent discussing the cultural backgrounds of Blacks, Chicanos, Asian-Americans, and native Americans. Guest speakers from different minority groups participated. Second, techniques of counseling and psychotherapy were explained. Third, crisis intervention, ethical issues, behavior pathology, and referral sources were discussed in class and included in assigned reading material.

In addition to the more didactic phase of the course, students also spent one and one-half hours a week in a small group setting (12-15 students) with one of the instructors. They would role play counselor-counselee interactions and receive group encounter experiences. This experiential phase of the course proved to be vital to the development of the students' interpersonal skills. The students seemed to particularly enjoy the small group encounters. Thus, they spent one and one-half hours per week in a large lecture class; for another one and one-half hours, the students participated in small groups with one of the five instructors. The instructors, who were also the program organizers, included two psychiatrists, a counseling psychologist, and two clinical psychology interns.

It was decided that after the training program, a number of the students would be selected to counsel minority students who wished to work with minority counselors. The counselors would receive supervision from Clinic staff members and would be paid for their services. Financial support for the counselors was committed by the University.

## Initial Problems

We had little idea of the number of students who would be interested in the program. Initial plans were made to enroll 40 students and to select half of these students for the actual counseling positions. We were quite surprised, then, to find over 80 students in the classroom during the first day of classes. Although a few students subsequently dropped the class, the enrollment was still

high with 28 Chicanos, 22 Asian-Americans, 10 Blacks, 5 Whites, and 5 American Indians.

The first day of class proved to be a very tumultuous one. After one of the instructors explained the purpose of the course and the outline of the program, several students challenged the purpose of the course and wanted to change its structure. The following points were raised: (1) Some students expressed the sentiment that if the program was designed to help minority students, the minority students should control the content and structure of the course. They were suspicious that the program was another example of the University imposing its values on "third world" students while professing a desire to help minorities. Two students went so far as to suggest that the program was actually intended to curb the activities of militant students. (2) Other students felt that the course outline was unacceptable since it focused mainly on the counseling of individuals experiencing personal problems. These students expressed their belief that the program, if actually intended to help minorities, should focus on changing American institutions rather than on helping individuals to adjust to a "sick" society. Personal problems, they maintained, could be best attributed to the racist society instead of the individual's psyche. The need for minority counselors was secondary to the need for social action. (3) Finally, another group of students wanted a stronger emphasis on helping minority students to have better access to financial aid services, tutorial programs, student health services, etc. They felt that minority students did not understand campus services and were reluctant to use them.

Although most of the students seemed interested in the course as outlined by the instructors, about 10 to 15 students expressed their hostility, suspicion, and dissatisfaction with the program. We were somewhat puzzled by the expression of hostility. One instructor explained that the staff's expertise was mainly in

the area of personal counseling and psychotherapy. Although social action was needed, the program could not be directed solely in this direction. As a compromise, the staff offered to give students exposure to campus services in addition to training in counseling. The students who would eventually serve as counselors could then aid counselees by explaining where to receive help for various problems, what kinds of campus services were available, and how the services operated. Various administrators would also be invited to discuss their role at the University. Most of the students were quite satisfied with the compromise.

After the first class period, the five instructors held a meeting and discussed the entire program. We were surprised by the confrontation and each of us felt apprehensive over the future of the project. In a real sense, however, the first meeting with the class was a learning experience. The suspicion and hostility expressed by many of the students was only a small indication of their general distrust of the University and society in general. The confrontation also provided us with some insight into the nature of the resistance to using mental health facilities. If many minority students externalized blame for personal problems, then they would feel that psychotherapy or counseling is useless. Furthermore, Blacks, Chicanos, Asians, and American Indian students were attempting to develop pride and ethnic identity. They did not like a majority-minority group relationship in which minority students would have little control.

Interestingly, several of the more militant ethnic students later approached individual staff members and expressed their feelings that the class was a good idea. Many of the students were apparently testing the staff to see how rigid, authoritarian, and unresponsive the program would be. Fortunately a compromise was reached.

## The Training Period

As the class sessions proceeded, the students seemed to enjoy the class a

great deal. The encounter sessions and role playing were particularly stimulating to them. The type of encounter for students differed somewhat according to the orientation of the particular instructor; however, the general approach was to help students to develop skills similar to what Carkhuff (1971) considers as facilitative (empathy, respect, and concreteness) and action (genuineness, confrontation, and immediacy) conditions.

Students gave each other feedback on how they performed as counselors and counselees. They took very seriously the feedback provided by their peers. For example, one role-playing counselor told his counselee (during the feedback session) that the counselee was quiet and hard to interact with. The role-playing counselee replied, "I couldn't talk to you because you were asking all sorts of questions and giving me all that advice--and you were off the track." Another student counselor admitted that he was unable to work with one role-playing counselee because the counselee was a minority student who had values of an "Uncle Tom." The class agreed that this counselor would have a difficult time working with counselees who had different values.

The small group encounters thus helped students to realize that their own biases and attitudes affected the quality of the counseling process. As a counselor, the student could not merely assume that the counselee was unresponsive or difficult to deal with. Often the counselor was responsible for the interaction. Being a minority individual working with peers was not a sufficient condition for therapeutic effectiveness. While minority status was helpful in empathizing and establishing rapport with peers, students realized that they needed to develop more effective interpersonal skills. The experience of being a counselee also helped students to realize those therapeutic conditions that seemed to elicit trust, rapport, and self exploration.

## Results of the Program and Discussion

While each of the five instructors varied somewhat in their approaches, several general conclusions were reached after the training phase ended.

Student characteristics. The 70 students who completed the counseling course were a diverse group. All of the major ethnic groups were represented and students' class levels ranged from freshmen to graduate students. On the whole, they were assertive, honest, and frank. The students were not afraid of openly criticizing the program. It should be noted, however, that after rapport was established between students and instructors, they exhibited very positive feelings about the program. All of the students were intensely interested in helping minority students, although their emphasis was focused on social action rather than counseling as a means of helping.

Changes in the level of functioning. While no formal measures of pre- and post-training levels of functioning were obtained, the staff felt that at the end of training most of the students were capable of forming effective helping relationships. The students learned to listen to the problems of others without offering quick solutions or superficial advice. The self awareness of themselves as stimulus values for counselees improved. They were better able to discriminate between personal and situational problems. The former involved emotional difficulties requiring intensive counseling (chronic hostility, death of parents, inability to form interpersonal relationships, etc.); the latter included temporary problems requiring information (where to obtain financial and tutorial services, how to deal with certain professors, what ethnic studies courses were available, etc.).

Several students developed exceptionally well. These students could easily identify and empathize with the problems of minority groups. Their integration of empathic understanding with their ability to communicate made them strong candidates for the counseling positions.

The selection of counselors. The final step in the program was the selection of those 20 students who would be employed as counselors. Since we wanted the selection to be a decision made jointly by the students and staff, the students in each of the small groups were asked to select five group members who would make the best counselors. The degree of consensus between the choices of students and staff was amazingly high. This high level of agreement reinforced our view that good counselors have therapeutic skills that are universally recognized. Counselor attributes and characteristics such as militancy, ethnic identification, or political orientation appeared to have little influence on the students' choices. From informal ratings in each group, openness, honesty, frankness, activeness, and a desire to help were viewed by students as favorable factors in counseling.

The major goal in initiating the UCLA Minority Counseling Project was to provide counseling services to minority groups. Our assumption that it is possible to train and utilize minority students as counselors for other minority students seems to be quite reasonable. To be sure, there were problems in defining the goals and in developing trust between students and staff. These difficulties, however, diminished as contact between students and staff became intimate and as both groups found areas of mutual compromise.

We feel that the program has been quite successful. The paraprofessional project enabled the students to translate their desires to help into concrete activities. After training, some students were functioning very well in the therapeutic role and considered careers in the helping professions. A number of students are currently employed as counselors and further plans are being made to continue courses in peer minority counseling.

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## Footnotes

[1]Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Portland, April, 1972.

[2]In addition to the author, members of the staff who organized the project included Robert Berns, Harry Ingham, Jill Janovici, and Jane Ann Pullen. Requests for reprints should be sent to Stanley Sue, Department of Psychology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98105.